In your arms (I think I might survive)
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In your arms (I think I might survive)

by MarvaLamb

Summary

5 times Bucky is compromised while sharing a bunk with one Gale Cleven
+ 1 time Gale climbs into Bucky's bunk because he might also be damned by his feelings for the man

"Gale is a fire, and Bucky would be glad to burn for five eternities if being here in Buck's arms for even another moment is the reward for the dangerous inferno of this man's embrace."

Notes

So, a little birdie told me that irl the Bucks shared a bunk in the POW camp because of how cold it got and my brain did A Thing(TM) and demanded a 5+1 based on that premise... and since there wasn't one already, I had to write it. You're welcome.

See the end of the work for more notes

The first time it happens is the first heavy snowfall of the year. It's the second week in November and several of the other men — especially the ones who have been there longer, whose clothes fall off of them from the weight they've lost in their months in the camp —have already started sharing bunks weeks ago when the first of the chill settled in. Tonight is unbearably cold. John can see the way Gale is curled in on himself, an echo of his own position. Their bunks are so close Bucky could reach out and touch the blond, but instead, he hesitates for nearly an hour. Gale is in a fitful sleep, barely holding onto a thread of unconsciousness from the cold. Bucky wants to climb in beside him, steal the other man's warmth, give him his own warmth.

Create warmth between them.

And therein lies the danger. Therein lies Bucky's hesitation.

Because as much as he wants this to be an innocent act of helping to warm himself and his friend in the cold of winter, even the thought of pulling Gale flush against his body makes his heart race and his blood boil.

Oh, the things he's imagined doing to his friend.

The things he would do if he knew Buck would let him.

The things he's not sure he could stop himself from doing if he climbed into that bunk and slotted himself against the firm lines of the object of his hidden affections.

So instead of going to Gale's bunk instantly on the coldest night to date, Bucky stays in his own and suffers, shivering until his teeth start to clatter. But after an hour of agonizing with himself between the frigid air and the consequences of being so close to Gale, Bucky can't take it anymore. He's lost feeling in his right hand and half of his toes. Gale can't be faring any better than he is if the way Bucky can see the other man's shoulders shake from time to time is any indication. This is more than just a desire.

This is a *need*.

Bucky climbs out of his bunk and takes the single step to bridge the gap between his and Gale's bunks. Bucky brings his blanket with him,

but the cold jumps up to meet him, colder than any Wisconsin night he can remember. The distance is the shortest he has ever crossed in the night — it takes less than a breath, but his heart is racing — so many beats pass before Bucky launches his thread-bare blanket over Buck and places a hand down on the sorry excuse the Germans call a mattress. Then, as easily as falling into his own bed at night, as if this wasn't something John has been agonizing about for the past hour, wanted to do for days, weeks — maybe since he *met* the other man — Bucky is wedging his body into the bunk beside Gale.

Buck is facing the wall, away from the room, and curled in on himself to preserve as much heat as possible. It's the most effortless thing John has done in his life to wrap his arms around the man and press his chest along the length of his back. He molds their bodies to each other from chest to knee, needing the warmth as much as relishing in the touch.

"Damn, Buck, you're freezing," Bucky whispers, gruff and low, into Buck's ear, his tone having *absolutely nothing* to do with the fact that he's suddenly flooded with warmth at his abrupt closeness to Gale. He's also lying, really, that Gale is freezing. As far as Bucky can tell the man he's wrapped himself around is a human heater.

Buck instantly leans back into his touch, letting out a relieved breath, as if the cold he's been holding in for the past several hours is released on that single exhale. Bucky feels ankles hitting his shins and he recognizes that Buck is uncurling from his fetal position as he relaxes into Bucky behind him.

Bucky lets out a breath in response and relaxes further into Gale in turn, the stress of the last hour's debating easing from his shoulders in a moment. Bucky is drawn in instantly to the open skin of Buck's neck. He can't help himself in his cold-addled state as he presses his face into the exposed skin there. Despite the extreme cold, the skin is warmer than his own face and Bucky is instantly warmed.

Gale hisses audibly and tenses in Bucky's grip. "Not as frozen as you are," his voice comes low and husky in the dark, barely there in the stillness. Buck turns his head just enough to meet Bucky's eyes in the darkness.

Bucky is distracted by the way his lips, still pressed into the soft skin of Gale's neck, drag just slightly with the motion. He pulls back just far enough to meet Gale's gaze even though every thought currently running through his mind is some variation of how he wants to press

his lips to the exposed flesh of Buck's neck.

Soft kisses. Gentle kisses. Wet kisses. Biting kisses. Harsh kisses. Lingering kisses. Kisses that would leave marks for days. Little nips to tease as he makes a journey across to new skin to explore further. Kisses that would have Buck writhing and making all sorts of noises that Bucky would have to move to silence so nobody would know what they're doing in the night while they're cuddled together for warmth.

Gale's eyes are searching when they meet his and Bucky wonders what he sees in Bucky's eyes. Are his eyes glossed over in obvious desire the way he feels? Or does he have more control than he feels? Does the cold have more of an effect than he thinks to the point where all that shows through of the way being here, Buck finally in his arms, the press of his body sending golden rushes of electricity through his whole system is dulled to nothing more than his normal gaze? Or maybe It's all there for Gale to see. But does he see it? Does he know? Is he oblivious? Does he know what it means when he sees that look in Bucky's eyes aimed toward him?

Whatever Gale is searching for with his scrutinizing look that's so magnetic it makes Bucky hold his breath, he seems to find it because the line in his forehead smooths at last. Something in his gaze lightens and he gets that glint in his eye he does sometimes when he talks to Bucky. It's the one that drives Bucky wild, the one that encourages bad behavior and dares him to act recklessly, especially when he knows he shouldn't but really wants to.

"What took you so long?" Gale grumbles, his smirk tugging wider at the edges. "Halfway to ice," Gale murmurs as he turns his head back the other way again and — that's an eye roll if Bucky has ever seen one from Buck Cleven. Bucky knows he must be grinning in response and shakes his head just so. He almost stops when it brings his lips into contact with Gale's neck again because that's exactly where he wants his lips to stay. He has to force himself away after a moment too long, settling his forehead and nose against Buck's head instead, his lips a safe — but agonizing — distance from the man's skin.

Before Bucky can properly process what is happening, the hand that is wrapped around Buck's torso is suddenly divested of its glove, but instead of being met by the numbing sting of the open air of the cabin, feeling starts to reenter his fingers in a startling buzz of unexpected warmth and Bucky has to suppress a wonton groan of arousal because —

Gale has not only taken the glove off of Bucky's hand, but he has taken said hand and guided it under all the layers of his own clothing to rest it against the white-hot skin of his lower stomach, and Bucky—Bucky cannot think anymore.

Bucky doesn't trust his voice, and even if he did, Gale's question seems like a distant dream. He makes a non-committal noise somewhere in the back of his throat, unable to do much more than that. "You seem to be doing okay."

Gale is a fire, and Bucky would be glad to burn for five eternities if being here in Buck's arms for even another moment is the reward for the dangerous inferno of this man's embrace.

"Better now," and really Buck shouldn't say things like that because Bucky is pressed right against the man and those words are *doing* things to him that he cannot explain if Gale notices. It takes every ounce of self-control not to allow himself to fall into the pleasure of being close to Gale, but he is not making it easy. He is, however, encouraged by those two words, so he presses in a little closer, slotting a knee between each of Gale's so they're wedged even tighter together in the small bunk. Gale makes the quietest sound of appreciation at the movement, even shifting with him to support the action, relaxing into it and helping the spooning along.

And *God.*

Bucky has heard a hundred women pant and moan and scream in bed before, but the sound Gale just made is the single most sensual sound he has ever heard in his life. He feels it in his gut, deep and aching and he's not sure how he's going to survive this night touching Gale but only *touching.*

"Give me your other hand," he almost doesn't hear the words because of how scattered his mind is. When he finally processes them, Bucky maneuvers so he can give Gale his other hand. It's a little awkward with the way they're arranged, but Gale makes it simple and somehow Bucky ends up cradling Gale against his chest with both arms around him, two bare hands against Gale's naked stomach under his clothes, Bucky's hands warming against the blond's smooth, toned skin as if everything they're doing is perfectly normal.

And the thing is, Bucky *feels* normal. His nose is pressed into the soft hairs at the base of Gale's neck and the warm skin there, lips a breath away from tender skin and he's never felt more content in his life. The

cold around him feels like a distant memory despite the fact he can still feel it along various parts of his body. Being with Gale, lying in the darkness, their breathing synched in a way he didn't even know was possible for two people — it feels like he's found something he's been looking for all along. Like he's found himself even as they're lost in the middle of Germany, in the middle of this war. For the first time in his life, it's like Bucky doesn't have to pretend about anything and it's all because of Gale Cleven.

Gale is in his arms, relaxed in the early stages of falling asleep, and Bucky is struck by a feeling, one that makes his chest tight like he can't breathe at the very idea in how much it terrifies him — that Gale is burrowed deep into his very soul. Sure, John Egan may climb out of this bed the next morning and Gale Cleven may no longer be in his arms, but the man he's holding will never leave his soul, and that is something John has never been more sure of than in this moment. It scares him more than anything else that he feels nothing but blissful contentment acknowledging the fact.

Bucky knows without a doubt that tonight will be the best night of sleep he’s had since he came to Europe.

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After that first night, it's not that things change between Gale and Bucky in the daylight, but they do end up sharing Gale's bunk in an unspoken agreement from then on. It's just too damn cold to sleep alone anymore.

The nights pass more or less the same as the first one, some combination of Bucky climbing in after Gale and wrapping himself shamelessly around the man, clinging desperately, drunk on the skin beneath him like he hasn't been on liquor in too long now, but to a similar effect, nonetheless. If anyone told Bucky that he could honest to God get drunk on being close to a person, he would have laughed at them—

Yet here he is.

And the evidence is damning, he's drunk as many nights on Gale Cleven now as he used to be back on Base with a good whiskey in hand.

Bucky thought that maybe after a few days of sharing a bunk with

Gale, he would get used to the weight of the man in his arms and that his desires would be easier to control over time since he would be used to having Gale there. Bucky was so, so very wrong. The more nights Bucky spends with Gale in his embrace the worse things get. Bucky has never been a patient man, and his impulse control is shoddy at the best of times when it comes to the simple pleasures of life.

That being said, Gale himself is certainly not helping the matter of Bucky's tentative control. Every night, Gale seems to relax further into Bucky's arms. Like when he pressed his own face into the warm flesh of Bucky's neck the fourth night like Bucky had done the first night, allowing them to press together, chest to chest so that Bucky was lying nearly on top of the other man, every part of them touching in a way they never had before.

Bucky nearly lost himself that night; he nearly gave into every hidden desire that whispers in the back of his mind constantly when he's around Gale but somehow he kept his hands from wandering too much, only slipping them under Gales shirt like the first night and warming them against his back and — admittedly — pressing the blond tighter against him.

In short, Bucky is losing his goddamn *mind* in the best possible way and it's all Gale Cleven's fault.

And it's hardly been a week.

At this rate, winter looms long ahead of Bucky.

Bucky is already lying in his bunk tonight. Their whole cabin is tense with thoughts of the war. Gale spent hours with the radio receiver pressed to his ear, rattling back every piece of news as it came across the channels. Bucky is wound tight with it all, itching under his skin at his inability to do anything about their circumstances in the war camp. He knows that it bothers Gale just as much, but true to the nature of the quieter man, he keeps it all to himself, carrying everything alone.

As the hour draws later more of the men climb into their bunk. Lights out is called and with a heavy sigh of resignation, Bucky takes slow steps toward Gale's bunk. He wonders if Gale will welcome him again tonight — If he still wants him here with how tense he must be after the day everyone has had and emotions running high. Would Gale want space tonight? Bucky casts his eyes back toward his own bunk

which still lay empty mere feet away, ready to take him back should he need it. Then he thinks of the past week, especially the past few nights and the way the blond had unabashedly returned Bucky's embrace the moment he'd crawled into the bunk. If Gale doesn't want him there tonight, he'll tell him.

With newfound resolve, Bucky pulls himself into the bunk. He's gentle about the way he approaches Gale in the too-small bed. The other man is pressed nearly nose to the wall, facing away from the room and Bucky. It makes Bucky wonder if he's even asleep, but he thinks he must be awake, deep in thought, by the way his shoulders are so tense and his breathing is too shallow to be restful. Bucky turns on his hip so he's facing Gale, scant inches between them on the narrow mattress.

He reaches out a hand, resting it on the broad shoulder of the other man. It's a test more than anything else. *Is this okay? Are you okay?* He wants to ask, but somehow, the question seems taboo, too close to saying something that shouldn't be said. It feels revealing, even in the darkness of the quarters and the small space of the bunk they've been sharing night after night.

Bucky's hand acts without his conscious mind, responding to the tense form of Gale's shoulders, acting on instinct and from practice with nervous and anxious women in the past. It's not on purpose, but it is Bucky's desire to comfort Gale after the day they've all had, so he really shouldn't be surprised by the way he trails his hand down from the shoulder down Gale's arm, grip sure and present, testing for tension, searching for where he might be able to relieve physical stress with practiced hands.

Gale lets out a long, tired sigh, his shoulders drooping just so, head relaxing into the bed more. It makes something unclench in Bucky in response. This is fine. He and Gale are fine.

Emboldened by the unspoken permission to touch, Bucky releases his grip on the other man's arm and moves it over to his back again. There's not really enough space on the tiny bunk to do this, not at this angle. Bucky's elbow is squished against his chest as he runs a firm hand down the tense line of Gale's back, looking for points of tension. There are several. He stops at one near his left shoulder blade and digs his gloved hand through all the layers of clothing in the hopes of relieving the tension there. He's not sure it's making any difference, except then Gale lets out a breathy sound of satisfaction.

“Feels good,” he says after another moment of Bucky’s attention. “It’s been a pretty shit day.”

Bucky makes a noise of agreement and moves his hand to another point of tension along Gale’s back. After another moment, his hand stills as he contemplates their position. An idea comes to his mind, unbidden and like lightning of Gale beneath him on his stomach, Bucky sitting on top of him so he has full access to the other man to rub him down and bring out more of those breathy sounds. In his mind’s eye, there are no clothes and they are far away from here in a warm place, the war long forgotten and over, and Bucky is free to do much more than the kind of touching he is doing now. His pulse picks up in his chest and his breathing catches suddenly in his throat.

Gale shifts so he can look back at Bucky, his gaze questioning and filled with concern in the barely-there light of the quarters. Bucky has to say something, but he can barely form a coherent thought, lust flooding his system. This is a bad idea. Yet, he wants to help Buck… a change in position *is technically* the best option. It doesn’t have to mean anything. And Bucky can control his desires. He can control his thoughts. This doesn’t have to be dangerous.

Bucky licks his too-dry lips before speaking, looking Gale in the eyes. “Let me help you, we’re too close like this.” Bucky presses both his hands against Gale to emphasize his point, scant inches separating them.

Gale only gives him a dubious look as if to say *what the hell are we supposed to do? There’s nowhere to go, dumbass.*

Bucky gives him a shit-eating grin in response, pleased that Gale is going along with another one of his impulsive ideas. He starts to move as if to get off the bunk entirely, propping himself up on one knee, then leans back down so his face is near Gale’s in the quiet of the room. “Lay on your stomach and I’ll go over you, be able to reach better that way.” Bucky can feel his pulse thudding in his ears. He’s terrified this is the end. Gale will say no, or simply shove him off the bunk, as precariously propped in the frame as he is now. He’ll be disgusted by the thought of Bucky above him in such a way — repulsed — and never want to speak to him again.

Nothing like that happens.

Gale simply shuffles over, positioning himself face-down, his face pillowed on his arms. He takes up the middle space of the bed, which

isn't saying much since his broad shoulders barely fit across the width of the bunk on his own, let alone with two people trying to fit into the space. Bucky closes his eyes briefly and lets out a shaky breath of relief and anticipation.

Once Gale has settled, Bucky arranges himself above him, bringing his hovering knee down on the mattress to straddle Buck's thighs. The cold is jarring like this, must be for Gale too since they've moved the blankets aside for the whole thing. The chill helps clear Bucky's mind of his racing thoughts.

In the quiet that fills his mind, all he can hear is his own breath and the thundering of his heartbeat in his ears. He leans down over Buck and places both his hands on his back just inside the lines of his shoulder blades, pressing in with his thumbs all along either side of his spine - the palms and fingers of his hands ghosting along his back in tandem with the action.

Gale relaxes into the mattress with a deep exhale and Bucky smiles, can feel the way his eyes crinkle at Gale's obvious pleasure. Bucky fists his knuckles and presses them into Gales's back with points of pressure as he meanders up his back again, finding knots of tension near his shoulders.

"You're so tight, Buck," He murmurs into Gale's ear, leaning down so his lips are close enough to feel the heat coming off the skin of Gale's neck.

Gale lets out the quietest moan as Bucky lets back up, releasing the tension from one of the knots in Gale's back. The man is putty below him and Bucky can feel a rush in his head at the sounds Gale is making.

"Gotta be quiet, Buck," Bucky chastises him, once again close to his ear, now on the other side, applying pressure to another knot he's found in Gale's back. "Take a deep breath," Bucky instructs quietly. Gale complies immediately, chest expanding under Bucky's hands and his obedience is intoxicating in a way Bucky has never experienced before. It makes his blood boil and run south dangerously. Bucky takes a stabilizing breath, willing himself to stay calm and focused only on the task at hand. "Breathe out." On Gale's exhale, Bucky presses harder into the knot in his back and Gale lets out another barely audible moan and Bucky has to close his eyes to keep himself sane against the sound. He's touched himself to memories of women and the sounds they make in bed in the past, but the sounds Gale is

making right now are downright sinful. Bucky lets up the pressure after a moment and like that the knot releases in Gale's back.

"Just like that," Bucky says, though he's not sure that his voice doesn't sound wrecked. He certainly feels like he may be drooling with arousal.

"Damn magic hands," Gale says in a voice that would sound drunk if Bucky didn't know any better. The words send an electric feeling through him straight to his gut and he has to hold back a moan and curb his desire to flip the man over and lean into him in earnest to show him just how magic his hands can be.

Instead, he leans in close again, a cocky smirk pulling at his lips and he demurs in Buck's ear, "Wouldn't be the first time I've been told that."

Gale huffs out a laugh. "You son of a bitch."

Bucky runs his hands up and down Gale's back a few more times, searching for any more points of tension, but he's too riled up to do much more, so he ends up mostly rubbing soothingly for a few minutes, Buck humming occasionally in satisfaction, much to Bucky's tormented delight.

Finally, he pats the other man's shoulder when Bucky's sure he's gotten ahold of his arousal enough to lay down beside Gale and sleep without causing a scene.

"Alright, alright, that's enough of that. Scoot over— I'm cold."

"Your own fault," Gale gripes back but turns onto his side to make room for Bucky to press in beside him. Bucky loops an arm around the blond and curls around him like he's grown far too comfortable doing the past week. They pull the blankets over the two of them and fall into a content silence. Gale lets out a deep breath then and leans back against Bucky and he has the thought that as far away as he is from everything he's ever known, he's never felt more at home than in this moment.

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The nights continue to get colder in Germany and it seems like everyone is sharing bunks now. An odd man out in winter is a frozen

man, after all. Night after night, Bucky continues to climb into Gale's bunk. Sometimes he even climbs in before the blond does and it's Buck who comes to greet Bucky in his own bed. However it starts, they always end up wrapped together for the sake of warmth, doing anything they can to conserve heat as the nights become more and more unbearable.

Tonight, snow is falling outside the windows and it's taking more time than usual for Gale to get comfortable against Bucky. Most of the time they lay so that Gale has his back to Bucky, sometimes it's the other way around, and on rare occasions, Gale likes to burrow into Bucky's neck, the two of them facing each other. Tonight Bucky climbs in after Gale so that he is pressed against Gale's back like they so often are, but Gale is restless, maybe too cold, maybe just on edge for whatever reason. Gale turns his head and catches Bucky's eye. Bucky squeezes Gale reassuringly at his waist where he has an arm slung around him then releases the grip, pulling back and moving his body away in question.

"What is it?" Bucky asks quietly.

Gale starts to shift, turning his body to face Bucky. "Turn over." Once Gale has shifted enough to face him, he places a hand on Bucky's shoulder to indicate he should turn over too, and Bucky's smile crinkles his eyes.

"Yeah, sure." As much as Bucky likes to be the big spoon, there's something about being held by Gale that Bucky really doesn't mind.

Even when they settle down, though, Gale's breathing still doesn't even out and deepen in the restful patterns of sleep. He continues to shift every few minutes as if there's something on his mind. The arm wrapped around Bucky's torso tenses and relaxes at seemingly random intervals.

Bucky has no idea what's bothering Gale tonight, but it's obvious the man is nowhere close to sleep. He huffs out a breath and shifts back around to try something else.

"Relax, Buck. You're thinkin' too much," Bucky huffs into the quiet as he finishes shifting to face Gale. He pulls him close, trying to arrange them so Buck can calm down enough to sleep.

Their fumbling for a comfortable position this way takes another moment and when Bucky shifts his head, Gale is *right there* — so much closer than Bucky meant, and his nose traces along his face

accidentally, bumps against the bridge of the other man's slender nose. Bucky's eyes are nearly crossed looking into Gale's, their breathing intermingled. Bucky has never wanted to lean in and kiss anyone more in his entire life.

But this— he doesn't want to ruin everything with Gale. Neither of them are drunk. Anything he does now could ruin everything he's ever had with Gale forever. He has to tread carefully, but he desperately can't think for the way that he wants this and he wants it so badly.

The thought comes to him then.

His eyes are torn from Gale's lips where they were caught and up to his eyes in an instant.

"Buck—" Gale's eyes are drawn to his immediately at the quiet urgency in Bucky's voice— where they'd been focused before, Bucky is too distracted to consider. "I want to try something, but you just have to—" Bucky licks his lips, nerves getting the better of him suddenly. He glances away and then back again, pushing through with renewed determination. "Just imagine I'm Marge, okay?"

Gale's eyebrows draw together in the slightest show of confusion, but before he can say anything, Bucky leans the rest of the way forward and presses his lips to Gale's, just a touch. He holds there for a few heartbeats waiting for the inevitable rejection, for Gale to push him away in horror and say he never wants to see him again. When he pulls back, Gale's eyes flutter open and his lips part as he takes in a shuddering breath.

There's a sinking feeling in Bucky's gut and he goes to draw away, thinking that all is lost. There's a hand at the back of his neck stopping his retreat when he tries, though.

"Little tame for *Marge,*" Buck's eyes are bright with mirth and something distinctly *else* and before Bucky can properly process anything, Gale's mouth is on his in a *filthy* kiss. It's all lips and teeth, Gale sucking Bucky's bottom lip into his mouth only to tug on it mercilessly with his teeth. The sensation has Bucky gasping against his mouth and Gale slips his tongue in as if that was his plan all along, tasting and teasing against Bucky's and—

This is more than kissing, this is *devouring*. It's needy and sensual. Gale is kissing him like a man who's been waiting for this kiss his whole life and like tomorrow will be too late. Bucky has no idea what to do with it except kiss back in kind. He's kissed women with this sort of

fervor before, with this sort of manic energy, but it never felt this way. It never meant anything when he did it with them. He's never kissed anyone who's meant anything to him until now. It's thrilling — terrifying —electrifying. All too soon he has to pull back to breathe.

He and Gale are both panting quietly when they pull apart and though he's short of breath, Bucky can't help that he can't quite pull away as they separate, stealing a few more short kisses from Gale's lips before he fully comes away to catch his breath. Gale leans his forehead against Bucky's, his eyes closed as his breathing starts to even out.

There's a tense moment where the silence starts to overwhelm Bucky and he thinks, even after all of that, Gale will reject him and call him crazy, but then he opens his eyes and smiles one of the most sincere smiles Bucky has ever seen, crinkles in the corners and all and tugs him closer into a more relaxed position like they would if they were cozying up to sleep, though their faces are still much too close for that.

Gale's smile shifts into an intensely serious face as he gazes directly into Bucky's eyes. "I think that was our best kiss, Marge," he grumbles, deep, low, and sensual, kissing at Bucky's jaw before dragging his lips up to Bucky's again for a few short kisses. Bucky responds in a daze, unsure what exactly is happening. He said Marge, and, yes, Bucky told him to, but the way he stared into Bucky's eyes tells him a different story. Bucky has learned to read Gale Cleven over the time they've known each other and if that man hadn't said Marge's name just now, he would have no doubts that every kiss against his lips in this moment is absolutely for him. Even so, the kisses feel like promises, they feel like they're for him. The words Gale said feel like a message saying that their kisses are better than Gale's kisses with Marge, and that's a dangerous thought.

Bucky doesn't know what to think, but really it's hard to think with Gale's lips against his anyway, so he lets it rest for the time being and just lets himself exist in this moment. He would rather have Gale like this in the illusion of love in the name of the woman he's writing home to than not at all anyway. If this is all it can be, then Bucky can live with that. He may be haunted by the touch of Gale Cleven for the rest of his life, but when he finally does lay to rest in the day he dies, he'll die knowing he's tasted the lips of Gale Cleven and that's all he can ask for at this point. He'll die a happy man.

Tonight Bucky falls asleep wrapped in Gale's arms with a smile on his face.

The weeks of December pass sluggishly. What should be a time of cheer and celebration is dulled by the fact that they're prisoners in the war camp. The mere mention of the holidays becomes a taboo of sorts, effectually bringing a gloom to any room instead of its usual cheer. Many of the men also fall sick despite their best efforts to stay warm and healthy. The conditions of the camp are not good.

In the long days, Bucky notices Gale watching him more. It's not that Gale never watched him before. They were always friends, and they always kept an eye out for each other. It wasn't even necessarily that he had his eyes on Bucky more moments of the day. It's just that when he catches Gale watching him now, sometimes there is a look in his eyes that he can't quite read. Doesn't always know what he means anymore. He used to think he knew all of Gales's looks, but now he's not so sure he does.

At night, when Bucky climbs into the bunk with Gale, it's all Bucky can do not to act like a starved man and desperately kiss Gale again the way they did before. Instead, he settles for allowing his hands to wander more, to blur the lines of what should be appropriate under the guise of getting comfortable. Some nights he presses his face against Gale's neck for a moment too long, his lips resting against open skin in what might be considered a kiss if they were anyone else. He'll mumble words there, his lips brushing the skin in the most addictive way. Gale will shudder under him but say nothing about it. They dance around it for a few nights.

Then Gale seems to cotton on to what Bucky is doing, that he is holding back. Seems to understand that he wants to kiss Gale but won't.

They're lying together, Bucky pressed against Gale's back, Bucky mumbling something into Gale's neck about a transmission they overheard that day when Gale cuts him off apropos of nothing.

"Like it when you do that," Gale says, voice husky and affected, arching his neck in a way that makes it unmistakable what he's referring to. "Damn tease, though."

Bucky freezes, whatever words had been on his lips stopping immediately. He feels his heart stutter in his chest. This is new territory and feels dangerous. Gale is encouraging him, and it feels

exciting, nonetheless.

“Maybe I like teasing you,” Bucky ventures against the skin of Gale’s neck just like before, finally daring to place a real kiss against the skin there before letting his lips drag the distance to Gale’s ear, letting them part just enough that his teeth skim the skin enough to make Gale shudder beneath him. When he reaches his destination, he nips at the delicate flesh of Gale’s earlobe, tugging it intentionally before releasing. “Don’t you get it? I like getting a reaction out of you.”

Gale’s already turning in the bunk to face him, words ready on his lips.

“Don’t count on it.” There’s a flicker of fire in Gale’s eyes that invites Bucky in, that says *do your worst, Bucky Egan— do whatever you want.*

Bucky takes that as a challenge and that’s when things start to shift between them in earnest.

Bucky reaches out to run his fingers through the man’s hair, stopping to tug at the strands. He trails sucking, wet kisses from Gale’s ear down to his jaw and then finally brings their lips together again for the first time in days, with no hesitation this time. The kiss is passionate and both of them are absorbed in an obvious battle of wills as they move against one another. This is both nothing like the kiss they shared the other night and glaringly similar. It holds all the same tenants of passion and adoration that Bucky had noticed before — but this kiss, it’s filled with future and longing. It’s the kiss of two people beginning something. Discovery, excitement, wonder.

Bucky doesn’t want it to end.

And, honestly? It doesn’t for a long while. Gale’s hands wander across Bucky’s body—his back, his hips, his hair, his face— exploring while they kiss for a long time. The actions mirror Bucky’s own interested touching. They eventually stop only when their kisses grow slow and it’s obvious the night has grown late enough for them to get sleepy. Gale’s eyes droop as he tries to hold Bucky’s gaze.

“Hi,” Bucky says, a dopy grin on his face.

Gale brushes his thumb across Bucky’s bottom lip in response and stares meaningfully into Bucky’s eyes. Gale’s rough fingertips make their way into Bucky’s hair, dragging their way along his scalp soothingly and pulling him close again to connect their lips in a slow, lazy kiss. It feels like time stops and the moment goes on for years and

an eternity yet only a second at the same time.

When Buck pulls back, he moves to kiss Bucky's cheek then down to his jaw and the hollow of his neck, and finally rests his head against Bucky's chest like that's that. Like it's all that simple. Like they didn't just make out for the past hour with no pretext. Just like last time, he doesn't know if it means anything.

Bucky rubs soothing circles into Gale's back until they both fall asleep and tries not to think about it.

The thing is, as the nights continue in the slow of December, it keeps happening. Bucky will be doing or saying something, Gale will make a comment and suddenly they'll be kissing and touching. Bucky's not sure how his daytime life is such a nightmare in the war camp when every night he lays down beside the man of his dreams. He tries not to think about the fact that Gale has Marge waiting for him after the war, especially when mail comes and there are letters for Buck and not for himself.

The reality is Bucky is here now and at night Gale is in his arms. It's Bucky's lips against Gale's not Marge's despite what game Bucky might have started this all with. He thinks on that sometimes — thinks about how Gale probably just imagines he's Marge every time they kiss. He hopes it's not true, but he wouldn't blame Gale if it was.

It's hard to believe Gale is thinking of anyone but Bucky when he kisses him the way he does, though. It's Christmas Eve when Bucky really starts to wonder if Gale thinks about Marge when they kiss. It's Christmas Eve when Bucky notices Gale may be interested in their kissing a little more than Bucky realized.

He's not sure why it took so long. If they both have the self-control of Saints or Bucky just hasn't been paying enough attention, but Gale pulls back from their heated kiss, eyes closed as he leans his forehead against Bucky's. He shifts his hips in what could be discomfort when Bucky feels something brush against him and —

Oh.

Feeling Gale's erection against him sends a flash of heat through Bucky and suddenly, he's not thinking clearly. He takes a centering breath through the haze.

"You good?"

“Just tired.” Gale’s voice is strained

It’s a lie, Bucky knows what’s going on here, but he lets it go. If Gale doesn’t want to keep going he’ll respect that.

“Okay. You wanna go to sleep now?” He asks it sincerely, but Bucky can’t help that he has a hand on Gale’s hip and it acts on its own, squeezing comfortingly, encouragingly, daringly. Gale’s eyes open, meeting his instantly. They’re hooded with lust and Bucky has to swallow and force himself not to look away. He licks his lips unconsciously. If Gale wants to stop, he’s looking at Bucky the wrong way. He would spend a thousand lifetimes at this camp if it meant being on the receiving end of that look from Gale Cleven every night.

He’s thinking about all the things he’s willing to do to Gale. All the things he would offer— would beg to do if only Gale would let him. He wonders if Gale would let him. The air between them is charged, and Gale seems to be trying to find the words to say. Maybe he does want this. Maybe he’s grappling with finding the way to ask considering the fact that Bucky isn’t Marge. Bucky should give him an out, help him. But a part of him bristles at the thought. Why should he have to make excuses for Gale and his hangups with a woman back home?

Bucky huffs and turns his face away, his eyes going hard suddenly. “You know what, you’re right. I’m getting tired too. We should just sleep.” Gale doesn’t say anything as Bucky shifts in the tiny bunk to turn his back to his body, just wraps his arm around Bucky’s waist, presses his face into the crook of Bucky’s neck, and breathes him in deeply. It feels like an apology when Gale’s fingers soothe circles into his stomach through the layers of fabric there. The last of the tension leaves Bucky with a deep exhale, his sudden spike of jealousy for Marge slipping away when Gale places soft kisses at the base of his neck before resting his forehead there. His breathing relaxes in that familiar pattern of sleep Bucky has grown to rely on more the past month more than he’d like to admit.

In the morning, Christmas dawns as a mix of emotions for all the prisoners in the camp. They want it to be a day they can celebrate, but the whole experience is sullied and muddied by the fact that they are prisoners. Even the most religious among them is struggling with faith and is broken and beaten down by the war. Far from home and family, stuck in an impossible, hopeless situation with only those also stuck in an equally impossible situation by their side, it’s hard to have any sort of Christmas spirit in the war camp.

Some of the prisoners are ignoring the holiday altogether, better to pretend it's just another day than be disappointed by all that they are missing and be torn apart by the aching loss of all that could be in that moment. For others, the loss is felt so deeply it results in a heavy moping around the barracks all day. In others, it's an edge in their eyes— anger at the Nazis for taking everything from them, and aggression tightens the lines of their bodies.

Even those who don't celebrate the holiday find themselves affected by the tensions running high.

Bucky's never been particularly religious, but the itch in his skin is turned up to eleven by the time night falls. He hates the way this camp and this war have stolen everything from the lives of everyone around him. It's the reason he joined before the States became involved in the war, to begin with. He couldn't stand the fact that so many were suffering everywhere. Bucky is nothing if not a man of action for what is right. It's one of the biggest reasons he hates being stuck in the prisoner of war camp too. He can't do anything for anyone from in here. He's useless.

Today reminds him of that more than anything and he wishes there was something he could do to change it all.

When he climbs into the bunk with Gale tonight, they're both morose. For a long while they just lay there quietly facing one another, neither one saying anything, neither one moving to hold the other despite the cold.

"You ever think about what it would've been like if we never went down? If we never came here?"

"I try not to dwell on it. Find the parts that aren't so bad."

Bucky scoffs at that. "You would look for the silver lining, wouldn't you? Why are you so goddamn perfect all the goddamn time, Gale Cleven? You never think about it at all? We could've hit twenty-five missions by now! Doesn't it ever make you think of all the possibilities? Instead, we're here. Just— wasting away." Bucky's hands are clenched between them, his eyes downcast to hide the wetness shining in them. John Egan does not cry. If his voice is wavering, it has nothing to do with it, either.

"We'll make it out, Bucky." There's so much conviction in Gale's voice that Bucky has to look up, but he still can't meet his eyes.

“Look at me.” He can’t. He tries, a breath shudders through him, but he can’t look Gale in the eyes, not when Gale’s so sure and right now Bucky’s so weak. He should be more sure too. “Look at me, John.”

His eyes snap up to Gale’s then and warm fingers tangle his own hands between them.

“We’ll make it out of here— and every day until then it’s you and me against everyone who stands in the way.” Bucky cracks a smile at that, a low chuckle leaving his lips, and if a tear tracks down his cheeks, well the only person that would ever know is Gale Cleven and he would never tell another soul.

It’s Gale’s birthday two days after Christmas and with the way things have been in the camp the last few days, and between the two of them especially, Bucky just wants to do something for the other man. Their somber conversation from Christmas night lays heavy between them throughout the next day. Even the slightly lighter mood of Gale’s birthday is tinged by the knowledge that it’s a day marked and marred by this place.

Buck hides it well just like he does every other day, but Bucky can see that he is affected today more than other days being stuck here. It’s in the way he throws himself more intently into listening to transmissions and talking about strategies and anything related to the war. He even spends some of his time that day in the camp library reading who knows what for several hours.

It all reads like avoidance to Bucky, not that he’s paying attention. He tries to be a steady presence for Buck, but he’s shit at being steady even for himself in life if he’s being honest, so he’s not sure it works out. He does drag Gale away from the library before he can hole up there all day, though, and bring him back to the barracks for some good-natured bonding in the evening. They may not have anything to get drunk on, but they all pass around birthday stories and their best tales from home, and for a few hours it feels a little less like a prisoner of war camp and just a little more like being back on base.

When they call lights out and Gale and Bucky crawl into their bunk, Bucky feels lighter than he has in a long time. He pulls Gale into his arms right away as they settle into the tiny bunk, Buck is facing him and that gives him plenty of access to his neck and jaw. Gale has a slow smile on his lips as Bucky noses along the sensitive flesh there.

“Somebody’s in a good mood today,” Gale rumbles quietly, a soft

chuckle escaping his lips.

“Hey, my best friend is catching up to my age, what’s not to celebrate.” Bucky quips back. Gale gives him an exasperated look.

“We both know that’s not how birthdays work.”

“It is until I have mine again,” Bucky argues. Gale seems to take that as enough of an answer and inclines his head just so, encouraging the exploration Bucky is making of the skin there.

Bucky’s been thinking of a present for Gale, but now that it’s the moment for it, he’s suddenly wary of what Gale’s reaction might be. His reactions to Bucky’s attentions so far are a good sign, though, so Bucky travels one of his hands across Gale’s chest in a casual exploration. It’s not something he’s let himself do much of in the past, maybe occasionally while they’re kissing heavily, but not while they’re doing something more casual like this.

“Hey, Buck?” Bucky’s voice is rough when he speaks, and he can’t bring himself to meet the other man’s eyes quite yet. He rests his hand on the material only a few inches above the waist of Gale’s pants.

“Yeah?” Gale doesn’t sound much better than Bucky, voice gravelly.

“I was thinking, there’s not much I can get you for your birthday this year,” Bucky licks his lips and finally meets Gale’s eyes, sure his own are blown wide with arousal. “But, uh, there’s something I was hoping you’d let me do for you.” Bucky watches Gale’s eyes for any sign he should stop as he slides his hand lower. He’s surprised to find Gale already half-hard in his pants when his hand comes to rest there.

“Let me help you feel good.”

Gale takes in a deep breath, his eyes dark with lust and Bucky knows he’s made the right choice this time. He always knew there was something animal in Buck if he could only draw it out of the other man. He feels a slow smile start to tug across his face. Gale doesn’t say anything, but keeps his gaze locked with Bucky’s as he brings his hand down over Bucky’s own in encouragement— and if that isn’t one of the hottest things Bucky has ever experienced.

“Don’t stop,” Gale says in that husky voice and Bucky kicks into gear, smile widening.

With the green light, Bucky moves to unbutton Gale’s pants. It makes

his heart race. He's only been with a man one other time before and it was a *very* drunken encounter. He wonders how it will be now, touching Gale.

He wants to watch the other man fall apart in pleasure— always so controlled and put together, it's one of the things Bucky always finds himself fantasizing about Gale. He's nearly high on the thought of being allowed to touch him in a way that will bring those dreams to reality.

Bucky watches Gale's face closely as he peels his gloves off and finally takes the blond in hand.

Gale swallows heavily and his eyes flicker closed.

Watching Gale as he touches is its own experience. Fast then slow, harder, dragging out his pleasure and making it as good as he can. Kisses along his neck, words of encouragement and praise. Bucky does it all for Gale and watches in rapture as Gale falls apart in his arms.

It's everything Bucky could have hoped for tonight and the lazy kisses afterward mean almost as much to him because it still feels normal, like even with this new layer things between them haven't changed too much and Bucky is grateful for that.

— 5 —

They don't talk about it after it happens. They continue to share the bunk as the nights continue to be cold enough to freeze a man to death alone. There's a new energy in the air between them now, something in the way Gale's eyes follow Bucky around even in the daylight. When Bucky crawls into the bunk at night, Gale's hands find his body with more ease, seeking him out rather than waiting for Bucky to press in first.

There's a simplicity to the way they lay together, to the way Gale is sometimes the one to hook his leg easily over Bucky's hips and pull him in closer now. It's like any of the reservations that he used to have crumbled and Bucky is left reeling at the implications. They don't talk about it, it's not something to risk even in the dead of night on the most silent of whispers — despite what they've *done* in the dead of night hidden only by the thin cloak of darkness, their bodies sometimes threatening to give them away by their heavy breathing in the stillness of the night.

And if those sorts of activities don't stop either, if Gale's newfound comfortability in initiating cuddling and spooning at night has led to Bucky being more comfortable grazing his lips against any skin of Gale's he can find whenever he feels like it while they're pressed tight against each other, then it's not really a surprise, is it?

He catches more of those rare Cleven smiles when he presses casual kisses to the underside of the man's jaw, nips at his earlobe, and if his lips wander to the other man's more nights than not, who's to blame Bucky? Gale doesn't complain. As the weeks wear on Bucky learns the contour of his lips and the taste of his tongue better than anyone else he's ever known. Their shared breaths warm him more than the layers of jackets or the thread-bare blankets ever could on those late winter nights.

More often now, Gale's lips have begun to wander across Bucky's own skin. It's a sinful feeling that has Bucky hard against Gale, and he's sure Gale must notice. He'd have to have with the way Bucky's pressed against Gale's leg. Gale bites a sensitive section of skin on Bucky's neck and it sends a spike of pleasure down to his growing erection. He lets out a hiss and can't help but tilt his hips against Gale's leg, seeking friction— anything.

Gale lets out an exhale of a laugh against Bucky's skin, his eyes glancing up to meet Bucky's, a glint of something wicked in them. It's not a look Bucky is familiar with seeing in Gale's eyes. There's a sudden pressure *right where Bucky needs it* and —

Fuck—

Oh fuck—

That's Gale's hand. Over the layers and with a glove, but he's moved it down between them to lay it over the line of Bucky's straining cock. Bucky's head is swimming in the sensation. There's nothing coherent in his mind, his mouth has fallen open in pure shock, his pupils are blown wide with heady arousal. Yes, he's touched Gale this way now, but he never really believed that Gale would ever want to touch him like that back — let alone that it would ever happen.

"Let me help you feel good," his voice is vulnerable, sensual, and all the things Bucky never suspected, nearly a whisper in his ear, followed by a gentle tug on his earlobe with his teeth and —God— that feels good too. Bucky is absolutely speechless for the space of several heartbeats. He has to swallow past the lump of arousal in his

throat before he can speak. He wants to scream *yes*, but something holds him back— is Buck only doing this because of what Bucky has done for him these past weeks? Does he feel pressured somehow? It was all one thing with the snuggling and kissing, even when Bucky helped get him off, Gale could imagine someone else, could think of Marge. It was just a kiss, just a body, a hand on him, after all. This, though — Bucky is *not* a woman. If Gale does this, he won't be pretending he's with someone else anymore. He can't. He has to *know* that. Has to *know what he is doing.*

"Buck— you don't have to, Marge—"

"Bucky—" Gale tries to cut him off, his voice insistent, but Bucky isn't having any of it.

"No, really Gale, you don't have to if you don't want to—" lips meet his suddenly, cutting him off. Rough fingertips drag through his hair and down the side of his face, stopping at the corner of his lips. Gale pulls back and this time his eyes are filled with resolve and sincerity.

"*John*— you're an idiot," is all Gale says before his lips are on his again, slow and sure this time, reassuring and calming. The hand on his face is gone then, moving down his body, a trail of fire even through the layers of clothing necessary in the cold winter night. Gale presses his thigh against Bucky's hardness, reminding him why he's an idiot in the first place.

Then Gale's hand is back to where it was before Bucky panicked and Bucky gasps when Gale squeezes him through the fabric with his ungloved hand. It's been so long since he's been touched by another person, and for that person to be Gale— it's almost more than he can take.

Gale takes advantage of his gasp to deepen their kiss, licking into his mouth easily, a dance they've done so many times now. Gale uses the kissing to keep Bucky quiet as he runs his hand along the length of his cock through the too-many layers of fabric that separate their skin.

Gale's hands make quick work of Bucky's buttons and before he's able to really fully process that this is really happening — that Gale Cleven is actually willingly—

Oh—

Gale's hand is surprisingly warm for the night being as cold as it is. Buck lets out a low groan when touches Bucky at last, flesh on flesh.

Bucky rocks his hips involuntarily, stifling his own sounds of pleasure as best he can. That sets them both into motion.

It's frantic after that. Bucky forgets himself in the sensation of Gale's warm fingers wrapped around him. It's rushed and clumsy and dry but Gale's more confident than Bucky expects in the way he pumps Bucky quick and sure, stroking his cock deliberately. Bucky wonders how many times he's done this to himself. If he's using that as a blueprint for the way he's pulling the pleasure from Bucky's body now. The image of Buck alone and touching himself sparks his arousal further and more heat floods his body. Bucky can feel how close he is now.

He's not sure how much longer he'll last, especially with how long it's been since he's been touched. Gale's lips trail down his jaw as he drags his thumb over the tip of Bucky's cock and it's all Bucky can do not to come right then. He lets out a strangled breath, aware of the fact that they are very much *not alone* in the room.

For some reason, that thought sends a shiver of electricity up Bucky's spine. He's nearly incoherent with pleasure at this point, chasing his pleasure from Gale's touch, but knowing they have to keep quiet and stay hidden is a heady thought that lights him up.

"C'mon, Gale. I'm almost there."

Gale's hand pauses.

Bucky's head snaps to look at Gale desperately to see why he stopped. Did he do something wrong?

Gale has a wicked smirk on his face. "Don't forget your manners, *Major,"* Gale whispers in the most rugged voice Bucky has ever heard from Gale's lips in his *life,* and Bucky's brain absolutely *short circuits*. He almost comes just from the way Gale calls him Major in that voice with his hand still on his cock, but somehow he keeps his composure.

Then, Gale squeezes him lightly in his grasp as if to remind him of his *manners—*

God this man is going to be the death of him. Bucky clears his throat past his arousal and manages a weak, "Please, *Major."* And *God* now he's *begging, too.*

Gale's eyes darken in lust, and his hand immediately resumes its ministrations, more insistently than before. Gale's lips find his in a harsh kiss as well, like any part of them that isn't touching will waste

away. And then it's all too much and Bucky can't hold back anymore —he comes in a blaze of heat, his moan caught in the kiss on Gale's mouth.

Gale kisses down his neck as Bucky rides out his pleasure.

Bucky knows they should clean up their mess, but Gale just zips him back up, pulls him close, and holds him in his post-orgasmic haze. They drift off to sleep like that, wrapped in each other's arms and content.

Happy. Safe. Home.

Three things that have nothing to do with *where* Bucky is and everything to do with *who* Bucky is with.

— +1 —

It's February but Bucky's not really paying attention to the date until mail comes in. Gale and several of the other men get letters and somehow, miraculously, by some *divine intervention of God* (but more likely they just held back the mail until today for some kind and cruel reason) it's Valentine's Day and several men are getting letters from their sweethearts.

Bucky is jealous.

He tries not to be, he really does, but he is. He's self-aware enough to admit to the fact at this point.

He blames the jealousy for the way that he tugs his blanket that has long been shared between himself and Gale off of the bunk he's started to think of as *theirs* a few hours before lights out is called while Gale is stepped out and distracted. He climbs into his own bunk a few feet away. It's sat cold and lonely for months now, and Bucky knows he'll be cold and lonely laying in it tonight, but he's mad. He doesn't want to lay beside Gale tonight. Not when he still has Marge. Not when everything they're doing means nothing to Gale.

Bucky fights against the empty feeling in his chest — the way his breathing feels too thin and his body feels far away from himself. He's fine.

He lays on his back staring at the bunk above him, though he doesn't

see anything.

He's distantly aware of movement in the room around him — of voices as time passes. It all washes over him.

Finally, the lights turn off and Bucky knows he should be feeling the cold right now— alone as he is— but he just feels numb. He's purposefully not thinking about anything and he thinks that should help him fall asleep, but it doesn't.

Instead, he's more awake than he's been in months.

Like a ghost, Gale appears at the foot of his bunk, hitting his booted feet to get his attention. It jolts Bucky's awareness back into himself if only slightly.

"Benny says you've been moping all evening."

"Yeah? Benny's an asshole." Gale gives him an unimpressed look.

"There a reason you're over here trying to freeze to death?"

"It's not so bad."

"Everyone in here is sharing a bunk, John. It's winter."

"And what about after winter?"

There's a beat of silence

"Is that what this is about?"

"You got another letter from Marge today."

Gale climbs into the bunk. Bucky tries to back away, toward the far side, away so they're not touching, but Gale doesn't let him. He drags him back to the middle and pins him down, straddling his hips and pinning every inch of himself down with every part of himself. He grabs Bucky's wrists and holds them down on either side of his head.

Gale brings his face close enough that Bucky has no choice but to stare into Gale's piercing gaze.

"John Egan, you listen to me right now." His words are biting and low — they demand to be heard. But he doesn't say anything more. Instead, his eyes soften as he keeps staring into Bucky's eyes. The fingers wrapped tight around Bucky's wrists loosen so they can soothe

circles into the skin there. After a moment Gale laces the fingers of one hand with his while the other hand reaches up to graze the skin of Bucky's face.

Bucky can't look away, can't breathe. He's mesmerized and terrified. He feels bare and naked before this man. He feels seen in a way he's not sure he's ever been seen before. This is a level of tenderness and adoration he's never experienced before and he's not sure he can handle it.

"Gale… " He can hardly get the word out. He wants to kiss the man, but Gale is moving again, his lips traveling across Bucky's face touching every inch of his skin.

"Shut up, John, I'm talking."

Bucky actually laughs then. It bubbles up from the warm full feeling that has begun to fill his chest since Gale came to stand beside his bunk. Leave it to Gale to think that this is talking. No wonder their communication is so bad. Bucky reaches his free hand up to push Gale's face away gently.

"Gale… you're really not." At Gale's grumpy look, Bucky continues. "Use your words. I'm— I'm still confused. What about Marge?"

"What about her?"

"Gale—" Bucky is flustered, he's angry on Marge's behalf, "You've been writing to her this whole time— I— you're in love with her! Every time you're with me you're thinking of her! I'm just a fill-in that you've taken pity on a few times. What do you mean, what about her? What about me?" Bucky props himself up on one elbow so that he doesn't have to have this conversation lying down. He's breathing hard despite the way the words are only a harsh whisper in the quiet of the bunk.

Gale moves with Bucky, letting them sit up in the bed as much as they can with how close the bunk above them is., but he doesn't move from straddling Bucky's hips. He has a contemplative look on his face as if assessing everything Bucky just said. Bucky isn't sure what to make of that. He expected Gale to instantly agree with everything he said and leave him be after that.

"You're right about one thing. I am writing to Marge. I've known her forever. But you're wrong about everything else… first of all, I never took pity on you. Second of all, you are *not* a fill-in. Lastly, I'm not in

love with Marge the way you think, and I certainly never, *ever* think of her when I'm with *you."* His eyes are clear and sure, holding Bucky's gaze unwaveringly.

Bucky is at a loss, he almost can't speak.

"Never?"

Gale runs a hand through Bucky's hair, tender and full of so much more meaning after that confession.

"Never."

Bucky's mind is reeling. How can this be real? This means that every time— every touch— every kiss—

"What about the first time?"

Gale gives Bucky the softest smile, the kind that lives in his eyes and touches the edges of his lips. "I've wanted you since before we shipped off to England, Bucky. I figured if you needed something to justify making that first move I wasn't going to argue with you. I was just happy to kiss you like I always wanted to."

Bucky is speechless.

"If you wanted me all the way back then, then why were you *with* Marge that night? Why agree to write to her?"

"What would you say if I told you she knows how I feel about you?"

That makes Bucky stop altogether.

"What?"

"She doesn't mind. Sometimes I tell her about you. She's glad that you make me happy. She wants to get to know you better after the war, too. I care about her, but since I met you— John I never felt so strongly about someone before I met you."

Bucky searches Gale's eyes. There's only one thing that look could possibly mean. He's afraid of it, but more afraid of never hearing it said, so he licks his lips, voice vulnerable in the quiet of the night, putting everything on the line for the possibility of those three words.

"You love me?"

“Shit, I— yeah, I do,” Gale says, caressing Bucky’s cheek gently. “I love you, John.”

“Fuck, I love you too, Gale.”

The kiss they share then is one Bucky will never forget. The first one where he knows with one hundred percent certainty that it’s him that Gale loves and adores and wants. Lips have never felt so right on his than Gale Cleven’s.

Bucky’s not entirely sure what the war will bring them next, but he’s known for a long time that it’d be him and Buck, and he doesn’t see that changing any time soon.

Gale Cleven is his forever.

End Notes

This was my first time writing any kind of smut so... hopefully, it wasn't awful /.\

I'd love to hear any thoughts or feedback y'all have about the story/my writing! Constructive criticism is always nice-- or just your squeeing because these boys are frankly idiots and I was rolling my eyes at their antics the entire time I was writing.

Thanks for reading! I had a lot of fun putting this together!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!